

Alans: The Missing Link between Orient and Oxident from the Genghisid Era

Dr Dina Doubrovskaja, Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS

Ossetians, living in the pivotal Caucasian region, are an ancient Indo-European nation of Iranian origin, direct descendants of Scythian tribes of Sarmatians and Alans. Ossetians identify themselves with Alans, unlike, say, Italians with Ancient Romans: their autonym is Alani, their country and football team are both called Alania. Alan-Sarmatian history includes such highlights as resistance to Gothic invasion in the 1st/2nd centuries C.E. and a strong state between Danube and Volga. Common ethnicity and past links them to Hungarian *Jász*.

Historical turmoil led many Alans into the Mongolian steppe and to Yuan China (1280—1368) where they were prominent at court as the Emperor Guard, *Asuud* (*Asūd* is plural of *As*, Arabic exonym for Alans; Chinese 阿蘭聊, *A-lan-liao*.) First mention of Far Eastern Alans comes from Christian missionaries and travelers. In 1245, a Franciscan Piano Carpini mentioned some Alans who still resisted the Mongol invasion. Then in 1253—1255 William of Rubruck reported seeing many Europeans in Asia, of which 30,000 Alans formed the Asud. Later Marco Polo praised the Asud's military qualities during a siege (and described the expedition's strange end when most warriors were killed sleeping); concurrently, John of Montecorvino converted many Alans to Catholicism. Later, the Asud joined a Mongol tribe of the same name. The role of Alans as intercultural envoys is especially clear with Giovanni Marignoli's embassy of 1336, when a letter was sent to the West from Great Khan, inviting Catholic mission to his court.

My paper follows the route of Alans from Caucasus to Mongol territories, and their role in the interconfessional and intercultural relations of East and West during the Yuan era.